

Balad, Iraq – On Wednesday, September 1st, 2004, soldiers from Bravo Company, “Regulators,” Task Force 1-77, participated in a grand opening ceremony at the Gatafan Primary School in downtown Balad. The Gatafan Primary School grand opening is the most recent event in OPERATION TIGER CUB, Task Force 1-77’s effort to repair or rebuild local schools, in order to help give the Iraqi children a chance at a brighter future. Gatafan School is attended by nearly 200 students from the surrounding neighborhood, and employs 8 teachers and 1 Headmistress.

The school, built in the early 1980s, had become severely damaged after two decades of neglect. The roof was collapsing in many places, the sewage system was inoperable, and there was no clean, safe place for the students to play during the school day. These poor conditions led the Balad City Council and Task Force 1-77 to identify repairing Gatafan School as a priority project.

The grand opening ceremony was attended by members of the Balad City Council, soldiers from Bravo Company, and dozens of local residents and children, many of whom will be students there when school starts in the coming weeks. First Lieutenant John Martin, Executive Officer of Bravo Company, addressed the gathering, thanking them for their continued support in the area. “This project was made possible through the hard work of the local community. The children who benefit from this new school will grow up to one day be the leaders of a brighter Iraq,” stated Lieutenant Martin.

Following the ceremonial ribbon cutting, guests were given refreshments and took a tour of the new school. Renovations included replacing the old roof, completely rebuilding the restrooms and septic system, and building several courts for the children to safely play on. The project, which cost over \$31,000, included building a new wall around the school. “Repairing Gatafan School is a tremendous gift to the people of Balad. The children and teachers thank everyone very much for their help,” said the school Headmistress, Mrs. Fatima. The children who attended the event were given an additional treat when soldiers handed out toys, stuffed animals, and school supplies. The supplies, donated by friends and family members of soldiers in the Task Force, were received with wild enthusiasm by the children. “It really makes these kids’ day when we are able to give them things like this,” said Staff Sergeant Jeffrey Wyatt. “These supplies show the compassion and generosity of the American people, who continue to support the soldiers over here through countless care packages.”

The Gatafan Primary School grand opening ceremony, the second school grand opening in the Task Force 1-77 area in the last two weeks, is another achievement as a part of TIGER CUB. To date, TIGER CUB has supported ground breakings on three new area schools, with another 8 new schools anticipated to begin in the coming weeks. To date the Task Force has spent over \$250,000 in efforts to improve area schools.

